Zachman International
Information Strategy and Architecture

July 20, 2001

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi
Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Principi:

I had the privilege of being present for the final two weekend working sessions that produced this historic milestone document, the Department of Veteran's Affairs (VA) Enterprise Architecture Strategy. I was impressed by your vision for the Department and your sense of urgency for addressing this vital issue. The Strategy has all of the attributes of a successful undertaking: Enterprise vision, business and information technology collaboration, and top management support. I was also impressed by the Department's realization that Enterprise Architecture is actually a business issue, not a technical issue. And I was extremely pleased that the 20 VA delegates to this Enterprise Architecture Innovation Team represented equal numbers of business executives and information technology executives.

The evidence of this complete business-technology collaboration was manifest in the Team's presentation to you during the final session … with Laura Miller, *Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health* defining Enterprise Architecture and why it is so important, Guy McMichael, *Acting Assistant Secretary for Information Technology* discussing the long term political and business ramifications, and Ventris Gibson, *Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management* describing the framework. I never thought I'd see the day!!

This document is insightful, coherent, comprehensive, and innovative --- a tribute to the clarity of vision and understanding that only can result from intense communication. I must also mention the gifted facilitation by a group of dedicated folks led by Professor Leon Kappelman that truly demonstrated the determination and perseverance of mountaineers on expedition. Finally, I was impressed with the stamina and commitment of the entire VA Enterprise Architecture Innovation Team. There was an intensity of participation. None were reticent to contribute. All were accepted and respected. From 7 AM in the morning 'till 12 Midnight, Thursday through Saturday weekend after weekend, the team remained focused on the "summit" of the Strategy.

I would like to take a moment now to talk about the road that lies ahead. The role of the Information Technology community in an Enterprise is not simply to build and run systems. This is what results in disintegration, "stovepipes." Rather the mission of the information folks in any Enterprise is *to engineer and manufacture the Enterprise such that it is aligned with the intent of General Management and is flexible, adaptable, interoperable, integrated, lean, etc. and responsive to the Enterprise's "customer" (as well as to other Enterprise "stakeholders").* I, in fact, suggest the name of "Information Systems" or "Information Technology" be changed to "Enterprise Engineering and Manufacturing" to set the correct perspective.

The role of "Enterprise Engineering and Manufacturing" is to engineer and manufacture the Enterprise, and Enterprise Architecture is the essential engineering of the Enterprise before manufacturing it in order to deliver something coherent that Management needs, to minimize "scrap and rework" and to avoid "legacies." I believe that the *Long Term* Objectives of "Enterprise Engineering and Manufacturing" is to make every cell ("primitive model") of the Framework for Enterprise Architecture explicit, enterprise-wide, horizontally integrated across each row, vertically integrated down each column, at an excruciating level of detail in order to: constitute an inventory of reusable components from which the Enterprise can be "assembled-to-order," serve as a baseline for

managing change (to the Enterprise), and provide the knowledge base for the Enterprise to which the external environment can be related and evaluated and from which management can derive their strategic advantage.

This is a new way of life. There is no quick fix. This is not a project. It is a "process." It is different from the Industrial Age past. It is the Information Age *present*! With that understanding, I would like to impart on you some advice that may help continue down your road to institutionalize the Department of Veterans Affairs Enterprise Architecture:

1. Do not underestimate the difficulty and complexity of engineering and manufacturing the most complex object yet conceived by humankind – the Enterprise. This will take time and determination.

2. This is a new way of life, a revolution in thinking, a discipline, an engineering process. Change of this magnitude takes time and perseverance. Do not get discouraged.

3. Things will have to be implemented periodically so you have to accept some risk of "scrap and rework," but build that risk and cost into the *short term* strategy. Set realistic expectations.

4. Make executive education and technical training a continuous process. Don't assume anything. It is easy to forget long-term issues in the short-term stress of daily life.

5. And remember, the state of the art is only fifty years old or so and the "playing field" still pretty level -- there is still much to learn and discover, and many opportunities to create advantage and value.

Finally, I would like to extend my congratulations to the you and your blue ribbon Enterprise Architecture Innovation Team for having the vision, courage and commitment to begin this process to move this most valuable federal department, into a position to better serve our Nation's veterans and their families in the 21st century.

Thank you for inviting me to take part in this historic and notable undertaking. I wish you all the very, very best!!

John A. Zachman